

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
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Meeker, CO 81641**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

Bull Canyon Rim Trail DOI-BLM-CO-N05-2015-0031-EA

Background

Dinosaur National Monument (DNM) currently manages a developed picnic area with entrance signs, asphalt parking to accommodate 10-15 vehicles, asphalt trails to picnic tables, a viewpoint with interpretive signs, and a double vault restroom adjacent to the Bull Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA). This site is receiving moderate use during the summer and fall months and is surrounded by BLM lands on three sides to the west, north, and east. The cliff rim where the proposed trail is located can be seen from the developed viewpoint and visitors are seeking the experience of traveling along this rim. This has created various parallel, braided and undefined user travels in the project area, some of which travel dangerously close to the cliff rim. A need was identified by WRFO staff to designate and define one trail that is a safe distance from cliff drop offs, concentrates use on one path in this particular area, and provides visitors the views, access, and experiences they are seeking.

The proposed 1.3 mile trail primarily consists of an evident user trail with recent use that parallels 10-20 ft away from the abrupt edge of a bedrock rim cliff drop off to Viewpoint 1. The trail corridor would be analyzed 50 ft either side of the proposed alignment line to provide on-the-ground flexibility when the trail is being constructed. This allows the trail to be located in the most sustainable areas and to be located around any obstacles as needed.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined at 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects as described in the White River Resource Area Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (1996). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context

The project is a site-specific action directly involving BLM administered public lands that do not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance. This project is located within the Bull Canyon WSA and on approximately 550 feet of DNM lands. The implementation of this project would result in the long term disturbance of up to 0.32 acres. The only management activities visible from the proposed trail are a wire fence that marks the approximate DNM/BLM boundary and the developments in the DNM Plug Hat Butte Picnic Area, which include the paved parking area, a vault toilet, picnic tables, surfaced trails, and an overlook with interpretive signage. There was a vegetation treatment conducted in the summer of 2014 approximately two miles north of the proposed trail to improve sage-grouse habitat. This project was determined to meet the WSA non-impairment standard and retain the Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I objective of retaining the existing character of the landscape. Other current activities known to occur in the Bull Canyon WSA include livestock grazing, big game hunting, and a low amount of off trail hiking and canyoneering.

Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the 10 Significance Criteria described at 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this Proposed Action:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Construction of the proposed trail is likely to result in beneficial effects to recreational visitors to this area. This project provides another amenity for visitors to the Plug Hat Butte Picnic Area and better facilitates this use of the area by providing visitors a safer and more sustainable method for traveling in the area than what exists. By establishing formal trail signage for this trail, visitors can also gain a clear expectation of the distance needed to travel to reach their viewpoint destinations and know where the trail will take them. This ensures that visitors are better prepared for the trail and understand that the trail will meet their desired experience. The Proposed Action will also result in some impacts to various resources as well. The removal of vegetation from the trail corridor will provide a potential gateway for invasive/noxious weed establishment. Increased levels of use by creating a trail also increases the likelihood of noxious/invasive weeds to be transported into the area on user clothes and shoes. Recreational day-use has the potential to disrupt nesting activities of migratory birds and raptors on a localized basis from mid-April through mid-August. Recreational activity that coincides with big game seasonal use would prompt avoidance and habitat disuse on a localized scale.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.

The Proposed Action is located in an area with extreme cliff drop offs. The intent of locating the trail a safe distance from the cliff edge to designed to improve visitor safety in this area while providing for the desired recreational experience of traveling near the cliff edge for the views down into Bull Canyon. The formal construction and signing of the proposed trail is likely to result in an increase of visitor use to this area. This means that the number of people traveling in an area with the cliff drop offs should increase exposing more people to this hazard. In order to increase visitor awareness of this hazard, signage is proposed to be installed at the beginning of

the trail that includes a prominent safety message warning about the extreme cliff drop offs near the trail.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

This project is located within the Bull Canyon WSA and on approximately 550 feet of DNM lands. This proposed trail provides a unique opportunity for those traveling along the trail to view the dramatic geography of the Bull Canyon drainage and experience traveling through the scenic surrounding landscape. Because the trail will be constructed, using basic hand tools with minimal ground disturbance and no excavation into the bedrock, the proposed action will not affect any paleontological resources. **4. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**

This project was discussed with both BLM-WRFO staff and DNM staff and no highly controversial effects on the quality of the human environment were identified. This project was also discussed with local representatives of The Wilderness Society with the same outcome. This project is designed to be Visual Resource Management Class I objective of retaining the existing character of the landscape and is not viewable from any location except when traveling on the trail. No other comments or concerns have been received regarding possible effects on the quality of the human environment during scoping.

5. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.

No highly uncertain or unknown risks to the human environment were identified during analysis of the Proposed Action or through scoping and outreach efforts.

6. Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The Proposed Action neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. All future management activities or proposed projects within WSA's must be determined to meet the non-impairment standard or meet one the defined exception criteria as defined in BLM Manual 6330-Management of Wilderness Study Areas.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

Combined with other past, present, and future management activities such as the development of the Plug Hat Butte Picnic Area, livestock grazing, big game hunting, and vegetation treatments, the Proposed Action does not relate to these actions in a manner that would result in any cumulatively significant impacts.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The proposed trail was surveyed for cultural resources at the Class III intensity level by the WRFO archaeologist, which included a 15 meter-wide area of potential effect (APE) buffer on either side of the proposed trail. The survey yielded no National Register or otherwise eligible historic properties in the APE that would be impacted by trail construction activities. Overall, the Proposed Action would not adversely affect any districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973.

The Proposed Action will not adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat. There are no known threatened, endangered or candidate animal species that are known to inhabit or derive important use from the project area

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Neither the Proposed Action nor impacts associated with it violate any laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Signature of Authorized Official

Field Manager

Date